INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

TO THE

MEDICAL SOCIETY

OF

STUDENTS AT EDINBURGH.

Read 2d of November 1771.

Veritas ſimplex, quibus eſt amori,
Hos amo, amplector, video libenter;
His mihi ſeros ſociis ſenectus
Impleat annos.

BUCHANAN.

EDINBURGH,

M, DCC, LXXII.

MEDICAL SOCIETY

OF

STUDENTS AT EDINBURGH.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,

YOU are now aſſembled for the firſt time this ſeſſion, and are to begin the buſineſs of the Medical Society. In imitation of the example of former Preſidents, it is my duty to recommend the concerns of this ſociety to your ſerious attention.

I well know, that, to thoſe who have had an opportunity of hearing former introductory exhortations, any thing I can now offer will be in a great meaſure ſuperfluous. I am perſuaded alſo, that, with all now preſent, a ſenſe of intereſt and of duty will enforce the obligations I mean to inculcate in much ſtronger language than I can employ. Permit me, however, to comply with eſtabliſhed cuſtom; excuſe me if I diſappoint your expectations; and accept of what I have now to offer, at leaſt as an apology for what might have been expected.

NONE

NONE of you, I dare ſay, are ignorant of the nature of that profeſſion in the ſtudy of which you are now engaged. Medicine is an art which propoſes for its object the preſervation of health and the cure of diſeaſe. An acquaintance with the means by which theſe ends may be obtained, is by inſtinct impreſſed upon the brute creation. Mankind ſeem to have derived their firſt knowledge of them from the ſame original. But inſtinct is not the only motive which prompts them to the ſtudy of medicine. The exerciſe of an art ſo eſſential to ſublunary happineſs is daily enforced by every motive of humanity. It is not then ſurprizing, that the cultivation and improvement of it ſhould have been attempted by an exertion of all the ſuperior powers of reaſon beſtowed on the human race.

THE progreſs which mankind have made in the advancement of arts in general, has been very conſiderable; among others, medicine has not been neglected; and the improve-

provements already made greatly facilitate the labour of preſent practitioners. But neither can any one expect to receive from inſtinct all that knowledge which the experience, obſervation, and ſtudy of ages, have gradually acquired; nor will thoſe who wiſh to practiſe the healing art with ſafety to others, or credit to themſelves, incline to remain ignorant of any improvement which time or attention has diſcovered. To facilitate the otherwiſe tedious labour of acquiring information, ſchools of medicine were firſt eſtabliſhed, and have been carefully attended to by all who mean to exerciſe that profeſſion on ſolid, rational, or ſatisfactory principles.

THE inhabitants of this iſland were long indebted to their neighbours on the Continent for inſtruction in medicine. But, from a liberal and independent ſpirit of inquiry, a ſchool of medicine was eſtabliſhed at this place, by a ſet of men, whoſe memories will be reſpected and honoured while the annals of that art are preſerved. Coeval with this

ſchool

ſchool is the ſociety to which you now belong; your firſt founders were animated by the example of their profeſſors; and, while they paid them all that deference to which longer experience or ſuperior abilities could intitle them, they did not heſitate to examine their opinions without reſerve. They well knew, that, by ſuch an examination, they could beſt arrive at truth, which was the grand object of their inquiry. The advantages which they derived from this ſociety have been ſufficiently evidenced by their known abilities, as well as their repeated acknowledgements.

At the eſtabliſhment of this ſociety, the ſyſtem of Boerhaave maintained in Europe a ſway as univerſal as ever that of Galen had done before. But the founders of this inſtitution, while they were far from being the leaſt ſenſible of the high merit of ſo great a maſter, did not heſitate to ſhake off a blind veneration for his errors. Reaſon, philoſophy, and experiment were their conſtant

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and their only guides. By theſe means, by ſuch men, and in this place, were the foundations of the Boerhaavian doctrine firſt ſhaken. By a liberal ſpirit of inquiry, and unwearied aſſiduity in the pupils, as well as in the profeſſors, the univerſity of Edinburgh became one of the firſt ſeminaries for medical education in Europe; and, wherever the fame of the Univerſity extended, that of the Medical Society was not unknown.

SUCH was the beginning of this ſociety. The diſtinguiſhed merit of its founders ſoon placed them at the head of their profeſſion in every quarter of the Britiſh empire. An example, from men ſo eminent and ſo worthy of imitation, has hitherto been properly followed, and the character of the ſociety uniformly ſupported.

I have thus given a ſhort account of the origin and character of the Medical Society. I need not obſerve, that the end which you have in view, is the ſame with that formerly

ly gained by your predeceſſors. Nor need I mention, that, for the attainment of this end, you enjoy every advantage which, as a ſociety, you could either deſire or expect.

THE different branches of medicine are at preſent tanght in this univerſity by a ſet of profeſſors, in no reſpect inferior to thoſe who firſt raiſed its reputation. While they exert the moſt unwearied labours in the purſuit of medical inquiries, they are unwilling that any farther deference ſhould be paid to their opinion than ariſes from conviction. They know, that in this room their opinions are compared without partiality or prejudice. They are not ignorant of the freedom with which objections to the doctrines they teach are here ſtarted; and they approve of your endeavours to impugn theſe doctrines. In every particular in which their patronage can be of any ſervice, it is always chearfully afforded.

BUT

But the abilities of the profeſſors, and the countenance which they give to this inſtitution, are not the only advantages you enjoy. You are now, as a ſociety, the proprietors of a medical library, by no means inconſiderable. From the preſent ſtate of your funds, you are able to purchaſe every new medical production which deſerves a place in any well choſen collection. Some of your abſent members have not been unmindful to add to your library, by ſending preſents of their own publications, not only from every quarter of Europe, but even from the continent of America. It is indeed true, that at this place there is no ſcarcity of medical books, either in public or private libraries. But the limitation of this collection to the members of the Medical Society, the facility with which they can at all times obtain books from thence, and the unlimited command which they have of theſe books, are circumſtances which render this library no inconſiderable advantage, at a place

where the concourſe of medical ſtudents is very great.

By the increaſe of your library, ſome inconvenience has, it is true, ariſen from the ſmallneſs of the room in which it is kept. But you have reaſon to expect that this will ſoon be remedied. I need not remind you, that, at the cloſe of laſt winter-ſeſſion, a ſubſcription was begun among yourſelves, for the purpoſe of building a hall, appropriated ſolely to the uſe of this ſociety; but, I may inform you, that, ſince your laſt meeting, the funds for this purpoſe have received very conſiderable additions.

The medical Profeſſors in this univerſity have unanimouſly ſubſcribed. Many of your abſent members, in different parts of Britain, now connected with this ſociety by no other tie, but a grateful remembrance of the benefit they formerly derived from it, have likewiſe promoted this undertaking. In due time, you may, with ſome degree of confidence, expect

pect returns to your circular letter, from members at a greater diſtance. There is alſo reaſon to hope, that, ſhould reſources from yourſelves be inſufficient, there are many, who, although they have never been connected with this inſtitution, yet, from a deſire to favour the advancement of ſcience, and to ſupport the reputation of the Univerſity of Edinburgh, will chearfully encourage a ſcheme which has met with the unanimous approbation of the medical Profeſſors, and of which they have undertaken the direction.

THE application of what has been delivered, to your preſent ſituation, is by no means difficult. When you conſider the example which has been ſet before you, the benefit which others have derived from this ſociety, the peculiar advantages with which you proſecute your ſtudies, and the encouragement with which, as a ſociety, you are favoured, you can be at no loſs to determine what ſhould be your conduct in this place.

THE

THE name of the medical ſociety ſtamps a certain degree of reputation upon all its members: This reputation you obtain even before you have done any thing to deſerve it. You owe it to your predeceſſors, and it is your duty to pay it to poſterity. If the preſent profeſſors have been able even to add to the former reputation of the Univerſity of Edinburgh, ſhall thoſe who have the benefit of ſtudying under them fail in ſupporting that of the Medical Society? Or, ſhall it be ſaid, that the preſent members of this ſociety neglect a duty, which, by the ſtrongeſt ties of honour, they are bound to perform?

BUT intereſt, as well as honour, ſhould prompt you to conſult the welfare of this ſociety. Your own private emolument is here intimately and inſeparably connected with the public good. The advantages which every individual derives from this ſociety, will always be proportioned to the vigour with which his own perſonal abilities are exerted for your common intereſt.

FOR

For the diſcovery of truth in matters of ſcience, it is neceſſary candidly to examine different opinions on every queſtion which has been a ſubject of controverſy. After this examination, it is requiſite that every one ſhould determine for himſelf. By ſubmitting the opinions you have in this manner adopted to the examination of others, if ill grounded, they will moſt readily be overturned, if eſtabliſhed upon truth, they will be ſtill farther confirmed. By freely propoſing doubts and difficulties, you may often receive information yourſelves, and frequently inſtruct others. By united endeavours, and noble emulation, great and rapid progreſs in the knowledge of this ſcience, in the ſtudy of which you are now engaged, may with confidence be expected; and your moſt ſanguine expectations in reſorting to this ſchool of medicine fully anſwered.

It may indeed be alledged, that the reward of labour in matters of ſcience is very uncertain. It is at the ſame time an undoubted fact,

fact, that many other particulars are much better introductions to practice than a profound knowledge in medicine. Accompliſhments of a different nature I mean not to deſpiſe. Many of them, if not abſolutely neceſſary, are at leaſt convenient and proper. But, where the lives of others are at ſtake, a thorough knowledge of the profeſſion itſelf is the firſt and grand eſſential. Aſſiduity and attention employed in acquiring this knowledge, conſtitute a degree of merit which at leaſt deſerves ſucceſs. But, to deſerve ſucceſs, is to do more than ſucceed; for many have ſucceeded without deſerving it. I truſt, however, that all who now hear me, while they live in hopes that they ſhall one day enjoy the emoluments of their profeſſion, will not neglect to enſure whatever merit can command.

Let me, however, admoniſh you, that your taſk is more difficult than that of your predeceſſors. It is an eaſier matter to acquire than to ſupport a character. Expectation

tation raiſed to a high pitch is difficultly ſatisfied, and diſappointment never fails to magnify evils. Nothing then, but the ſtrongeſt exertion from this ſociety, as a body, will be ſufficient to ſupport its former character. But, an exertion from the ſociety conſiſts in an exertion from every individual. Let no one then truſt to his neighbour. Let no one plead example as an excuſe for indolence; but let every member conſider it as his duty to act in the ſame manner as if upon him alone the character of the ſociety entirely depended.

By a conduct of this nature, your former members merited and obtained the higheſt rank in the public eſtimation; and many of them are now living monuments of the utility of this inſtitution. When you are animated by ſuch examples, need I recommend it to you to follow a tract pointed out by men, who have not only ſupported the dignity, but even advanced the honour of their profeſſion.

By

By a conduct ſimilar to theirs, you will beſt be enabled to improve yourſelves and inſtruct others. By this alone can you tranſmit, undiminiſhed, to your ſucceſſors, that character which has devolved to you. By this will you be able to ſet an example, which, properly followed, may perpetuate the Medical Society while the ſcience of medicine continues to be taught at this Univerſity.

I truſt, Gentlemen, that you are not leſs ſenſible of your intereſt, or leſs jealous of your honour, than any of your predeceſſors. With confidence then, I expect, that this ſeſſion of the Medical Society will be inferior to none ſince its firſt inſtitution.

FINIS.

AN

ACCOUNT

OF THE

SCHEME for building a HALL for the MEDICAL SOCIETY at Edinburgh.

THE Medical Society of the ſtudents at Edinburgh was inſtituted in the year one thouſand ſeven hundred and thirty-ſeven. For a long time paſt they have been allowed by the managers of the Royal Infirmary to hold their weekly meetings in that hoſpital; ſince which period, the money formerly employed in defraying their expences at a tavern, has been appropriated to the purchaſe of books. The library thus formed amounts now to ſome thouſand volumes, and has hitherto been kept in a room, for which they are likewiſe indebted to the Managers of the Royal Infirmary.

FROM a ſituation ſo honourable for themſelves, they probably would never have thought of moving, had it continued as convenient for their purpoſe as it was at firſt. But, by the gradual increaſe of their library, the room allotted for it became inſufficient for containing all their books. In this ſituation, they were again obliged to apply to their former benefactors, who have favoured them with the uſe of another ſmall room, ſo long as they ſhall think it can be ſpared from thoſe purpoſes for which the hoſpital is particularly intended.

BY this indulgence, the inconveniencies under which they formerly laboured are at preſent in ſome degree removed. But, although they are convinced that the Managers of the Royal Infirmary will, with the greateſt chearfulneſs, afford them aſſiſtance in every circumſtance which is not incompatible with the intereſt of the hoſpital; yet it is obvious, that the preſent is but a temporary and an uncertain relief. Beſides this, their books

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are not in ſuch a ſituation as could be deſired, either with regard to conveniency or preſervation.

FROM theſe conſiderations, the Society were naturally led to think of ſome means by which the inconveniencies above ſtated might be moſt effectually remedied. With this view, a ſubſcription was begun among the attending members, during the laſt winter-ſeſſion, for the purpoſe of building a HALL, to be appropriated ſolely to the uſe of the ſociety. At the concluſion of their meetings for laſt ſeaſon, the ſum ſubſcribed for the intended hall amounted to one hundred and thirty pounds. Since that time, many ſubſcriptions, from one to five guineas, have been received from different parts of Britain, by which the fund for their hall is now increaſed to two hundred and ten pounds. Although this ſum is by no means ſufficient for compleatly executing their intended plan; yet they think it adviſable, that the work ſhould be begun with all convenient ſpeed; and

and they are not without hopes, that, before it be much advanced, new ſubſcriptions will enable them to compleat it without delay.

MANY have already ſubſcribed to this ſcheme, from a grateful ſenſe of the advantages they formerly derived from the medical ſociety; and it is not doubted, that others who have formerly been in the ſame ſituation, will ſoon take an opportunity of following their example. It is even imagined, that numbers who have never been connected with it will chearfully encourage an inſtitution which has had no inconſiderable ſhare in raiſing and ſupporting the reputation of a medical college in Britain.

THOSE who incline to promote this undertaking, may tranſmit their ſubſcriptions either to Doctors WILLIAM CULLEN, JOHN GREGORY, or ANDREW DUNCAN, phyſicians in Edinburgh, who, with the annual preſidents of the ſociety, are the committee to whom the direction of this affair is intruſted.